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New Charges, Admission On Waldheim's Record

He Now Concedes Link to Germans' Kozara 'Pacification'

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After denying for months that he had anything to do with a 1942 Nazi operation that resulted in the massacre of Yugoslav civilians in a mountainous area called Kozara, Kurt Waldheim has acknowledged that he did take part in the operation, a brutal "pacification" effort at the height of World War II.

A spokesman for Waldheim said in the course of several telephone interviews that the Austrian president did serve in the Kozara area, in the western part of Yugoslavia's province of Bosnia, in the spring and summer of 1942, but that he was a "supply officer" not engaged in the fighting.

In a 13-page memo Waldheim's son presented to The Washington Post last April, Waldheim emphatically denied that he was in the Kozara area during the spring and summer of 1942. He said he had been transferred to the command staff of the Wehrmacht's Combat Group West Bosnia, which planned and conducted the operation. But he contended that this was only a paper assignment for record-keeping purposes and that he was sent almost immediately to be a liaison officer with an Italian infantry division located 180 miles away.

Waldheim's spokesman, Gerold Christian, said that "additional research" has now revealed that Waldheim's earlier statement was incorrect.

Accusations of war crimes brought against Waldheim after the war by the Yugoslav government, first disclosed publicly last spring, involved later episodes in 1944 and 1945. In recent interviews in Yugoslavia, retired Yugoslav intelligence officers said those formal charges were drawn up largely to

try to blackmail Waldheim into becoming a Yugoslav or Soviet agent, and were not legally persuasive. The formal indictment of Waldheim, obtained by The Post, was based on charges by other Austrians who fought with the Nazis, several of whom were later executed as war criminals themselves.

Waldheim's acknowledged participation in the Kozara operation raises new questions about his wartime role. Though his spokesman, Christian, said that during the Kozara campaign Waldheim "was assigned as a special missions staff officer to the staff of the quartermaster" and "had the duties of a supply officer," records show that Lt. Kurt Waldheim was a member of the command staff of 29 men under Gen. Friedrich von Stahl, the Nazi commander at Kozara.

German reports list Waldheim among 34 men in the German army singled out for meritorious service in the Kozara campaign. Documents show that Stahl recommended Waldheim and seven other officers for the King Zvonimir Medal of the puppet Croatian government for "heroic bravery in the battle against the insurgents in the spring and summer of 1942." Waldheim received the medal with an oak leaf decoration that was reserved for those who distinguished themselves "under enemy fire," according to an official Nazi description of the medal. Three months later Waldheim was promoted to first lieutenant.

An Austrian Foreign Ministry document issued at the time of his retirement in 1983 shows that Waldheim had listed the 1942 award of the King Zvonimir Medal in his personnel file.

In his earlier statements, Waldheim had insisted that the Kozara operation did not involve a massacre of the local population. "That's nonsense," he was quoted by the Belgrade newspaper *Vecernje Novosti* as saying. "There was no massacre, there were fierce battles."

An order issued by the German command staff at the start of the Kozara operation on June 4 said that "all males over the age of 14, except the very old men, have to be arrested. They should—under the threat of summary execution—be forced to provide information about the enemy, in order to obtain data for pursuing further military operations."

The objective of the operation, according to Stahl's order outlining it, was to remove the entire population of the region and eventually resettle it with a "reliable" population. The total number of people in the Kozara area was about 80,000, including 3,500 armed partisans.

The ferocity of the final days of the operation, after the Axis forces—33,000 strong—had broken the resistance of Tito's partisans and encircled tens of thousands of civilians hiding in the forest of Mt. Kozara, was captured by German war correspondent Kurt Neher:

"And then came the most horrifying part of all," he wrote in a contemporary dispatch, "that made everyone's blood run cold—a woman started screaming hard and long and hundreds took up her call. Men, women and children threw themselves with beastly intensity upon our lines. It seemed to us as if we were present at the instant of the forming of the primal human horde, with men rushing us in human waves, intent on self-destruction and mindless of all fear. Their faces were bestial, belonging to a truly lower race."

When the operation ended on July 18, Stahl proclaimed it "a great success."

"The enemy has been annihilated or captured, and the entire population of the encircled area have been removed, thus effecting a thorough pacification of the territory," Stahl said in his order of the day.

Yugoslav figures show that of the 3,500 armed partisans, 1,900 survived the battle after they managed to break through the encirclement at Patria on July 4. Of more than 81,000 unarmed people in the area at the time of the encirclement,

13,000 were killed and 68,000 were evacuated to concentration camps or sent to forced labor in Germany and Norway. Many persons perished in long marches to concentration camps.

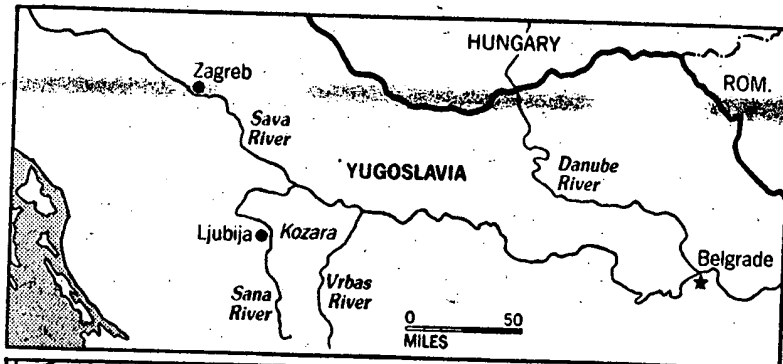
In the camps, 23,000 children under the age of 14 were separated from their parents and sent to special children's camps where 11,000 died of starvation and disease. Historian Dragoje Lukic, 53, one of the children who survived, had to look 12 years for his younger brother, who was taken to a different camp. Another camp survivor, journalist Jovan Kesar, 49, has been one of the most aggressive Yugoslav reporters investigating Waldheim's past.

The Germans decided to pacify the Kozara and Podgrmec territory—an area of western Bosnia flanked by the rivers Sava, Vrbas and Sana—after its predominantly Serb population mounted an open rebellion in early 1942, according to Yugoslav accounts. It was a spontaneous revolt in response to atrocities committed in the area against Serbs, Jews and Gypsies by the Ustashi, as the Croat fascists were known. The Yugoslav Communists used the rebellion to establish a strong foothold in the area and establish their political control.

Kozara was the largest section of liberated territory under Marshal Tito's control. More important, it was located near Zagreb, the capital of the Croatian puppet state, and the main German communication lines running from Zagreb via Belgrade to Athens. Moreover, the rebels had taken over a major iron ore mine at Ljubija, and controlled rail and road communications.

At a meeting of the German High Command for the South-East at Arsakli, near Salonica, on May 20, a decision was made to "clear and pacify" the West Bosnian region around the Kozara mountain. The Combat Group West Bosnia was formed on May 23 under Stahl.

Documents exist that might be able to clear up questions about Waldheim's role at Kozara. An explanation of the King Zvonimir Medal he was awarded is thought to be located in the Croatian fascist state archives, which are currently in Zagreb. However, Croatian com-



BY CLARICE BORIO - THE WASHINGTON POST

munist leaders have resisted efforts to open these files to historians and researchers.

The Yugoslav government decided earlier this year not to cooperate with any research into Waldheim's past. Government officials in Belgrade say directly that they value good relations with Austria and have no interest in the controversy.

Historian Vladimir Dedijer, who is chairman of the Genocide Commission of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, said he has 242 documents about the Kozara operation, some of them implicating Waldheim. Dedijer, Tito's official biographer, also has the late Yugoslav leader's personal archive.

Dedijer said he had turned over the Kozara documents to the Inter-

national War Crimes Tribunal, founded by the late British philosopher Bertrand Russell. The tribunal has formed an Executive Committee on Kurt Waldheim in London, and has formally asked the Austrian government for permission to hold a public tribunal in Vienna. The tribunal declined to make the documents available to The Washington Post.